

a total of \$1,200. Just last year, FHA premium cuts reduced the downpayments for 550,000 families across the country.

In 1994, I called upon the Department of Housing and Urban Development to develop a strategy to boost homeownership to an all-time high—to produce 8 million new American homeowners by the year 2000. Through our National Homeownership Strategy, more than 2.5 million American families have already become homeowners. Today, more Americans are homeowners than at any time in history.

We know homeownership is strengthening families and stabilizing neighborhoods. As part of that strategy, I challenged HUD to do what it could to remove some of the barriers young families face when buying their first home. Too often, front-end closing costs, not monthly payments, stand between a hard-working family and a new home. Our goal was to cut those up-front costs by \$1,000; with today's action, we have cut those costs by \$1,200.

I applaud Secretary Cuomo for going the extra mile, surpassing the challenge I set in 1994 and providing the extra boost needed to make the dream of homeownership a reality for thousands more families.

Statement on the Federal Election Commission Decision on the Soft Money System in Domestic Politics

June 12, 1997

I applaud the Federal Election Commission's unanimous decision to begin to consider my request that they act to ban soft money in Federal elections. This is an important step in our effort to reform our elections and restore the trust of the American people in their political system.

As I said in my petition to the FEC, the rules governing our system of financing Federal election campaigns are sorely out of date. The system has been overwhelmed by a tide of money, raised in amounts and in ways that could not have been contemplated when the system was created two decades ago. I believe that the FEC has the authority and the obligation to take dramatic action, and I am pleased that five congressional

sponsors of bipartisan campaign finance reform, led by Congressmen Shays and Meehan, have filed a similar petition before the Commission.

I urge the FEC to take the next step and begin the process of writing new rules that will ban soft money. I hope this action will encourage Congress to enact comprehensive, bipartisan campaign finance reform.

Statement on Enlargement of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization

June 12, 1997

After careful consideration, I have decided that the United States will support inviting three countries—Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic—to begin accession talks to join NATO when we meet in Madrid next month.

We have said all along that we would judge aspiring members by their ability to add strength to the alliance and their readiness to shoulder the obligations of NATO membership. Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic most clearly meet those criteria—and have currently made the greatest strides in military capacity and political and economic reform.

As I have repeatedly emphasized, the first new members should not and will not be the last. We will continue to work with other interested nations, such as Slovenia and Romania, to help them prepare for membership. Other nations are making good progress—and none will be excluded from consideration.

We look forward to working with our NATO Allies to reach agreement on this important issue.

Statement on Passage of Emergency Supplemental Appropriations Legislation

June 12, 1997

I applaud the United States Congress for passing the disaster relief bill that the families of the Midwest and other parts of the country desperately need. I am especially pleased that the congressional majority heeded the call of common sense by ensuring that

the people who need this assistance will get it and by ensuring that the controversial and extraneous provisions of the bill were dropped. Anyone who has toured the flood-ravaged areas of the Midwest, as I have, knows that these needed funds will help put America's families and communities on the road to recovery. Above all, today's vote shows that while we may not agree on everything, we can still work together and move forward on those crucial priorities that are beyond dispute. I thank the Congress for its willingness to do so, and I hope we can continue to work together in that spirit in the weeks and months to come.

Statement on Signing Emergency Supplemental Appropriations Legislation

June 12, 1997

I am pleased to sign into law tonight the disaster relief bill that Congress has just sent to me.

This bill provides the desperately needed resources for hundreds of thousands of people who have suffered terribly from the flooding and other natural disasters in the Dakotas, Minnesota, California, and 29 other States. It also includes the necessary funds for the Department of Defense in connection with our peacekeeping efforts in Bosnia and Southwest Asia. It does not include the unacceptable political provisions of the bill I vetoed that had nothing to do with the goal of providing disaster relief.

When our people are in need, we Americans come to their assistance as one nation. I applaud the Congress for heeding my call to remember that fundamental principle.

NOTE: H.R. 1871, 1997 Emergency Supplemental Appropriations Act for Recovery from Natural Disasters, and for Overseas Peacekeeping Efforts, Including Those in Bosnia, approved June 12, was assigned Public Law No. 105-18.

Proclamation 7010—Father's Day, 1997

June 12, 1997

By the President of the United States of America

A Proclamation

Raising a child is a sacred mission, and the man who welcomes this mission and embraces the obligations of fatherhood is someone who truly deserves our recognition and gratitude. On Father's Day, we honor all the men across our country who have affirmed the importance of parenthood by willingly assuming its important responsibilities.

The tight grasp of a newborn baby's tiny hand curled around his or her father's finger only hints at the strength of the bond that will grow in all the seasons of life between father and child. Caring fathers are not content to merely safeguard their children's physical well-being, but also seek to foster their spiritual and moral growth, and pass on their most cherished values. Mentor, teacher, coach, friend, and hero, a father gives his son or daughter all that his mind, his hands, and his heart can provide. No work is too hard, no sacrifice is too great if doing so will strengthen, protect, nurture, and instill joy in his child.

Fathers teach their children to take pride in themselves and their work, to assume responsibility for their lives and character, and to understand the rewards of sharing with others. Most important, fathers—whether biological, adoptive, or foster—offer the strong, steady current of love that sustains their sons and daughters through the good times and bad times that all of us face.

Our Nation is blessed that so many Americans cherish the role of fatherhood in our families, for fathers add a crucial stability and strength to our lives. On Father's Day, let us honor and give thanks to these men who share with their children not only the precious gifts of life and love, but also their time, attention, and the kind of caring concern that lasts a lifetime.